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(Justice)

Government will appeal decision of arbitration panel on pay equity

Attorney General, Chris Decker, and Julie Bettney, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, said today that Government has accepted legal advice to apply to the Supreme Court of Newfoundland for Judicial Review of an award handed down on pay equity earlier this week. The arbitration panel, constituted under the Public Service Collective Bargaining Act to hear grievances, ruled against government in deciding a claim by a number of bargaining units in the Health Care Sector. The claim was for pay equity adjustments retroactive to 1988 from 1991, when pay equity adjustments began.

"Officials in my department are of the view that the arbitration decision should be appealed on the grounds that the arbitration panel exceeded its jurisdiction in deciding the issue, and that the panel erred in law in its conclusions," said Mr. Decker. "Treasury Board officials advise that implementation of the award of the arbitration panel could cost government from $50 to $80 million. We have no alternative but to appeal the decision through the court process."

"Government remains committed to pay equity," said Minister Bettney. "It is important to recognize that pay equity was not cancelled by the 1991 Public Sector Restraint Act. Government began making pay equity adjustments in 1991, prospectively . This legislation simply gave government more time to eliminate gender discrimination within the compensation system. This is a priority with Government, but like other priorities, must be managed within a time frame which is more consistent with government's ability to pay."

Both ministers said that government is now spending $27 million per year on pay equity adjustments throughout the public sector. By the time the pay equity process is completed in the year 2,000, government will be spending almost $50 million a year for about 11,000 public sector employees.

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